



MORTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Kyle L. Kirchmeier, Sheriff



NEWS RELEASE

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LASER STRIKES AGAINST AIRCRAFT LINKED TO DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE PROTEST

Authorities are investigating two incidents of laser strikes against aircraft being utilized for observation of the Dakota Access Pipeline protest site. The first laser attack happened Wednesday, August 17th around 5:15 a.m. The pilot reported a laser beam entering the cockpit and hitting him in the eye. He cited being blinded temporarily. A second occurrence took place Sunday, August 21st around 12:45 a.m. He reported that he was able to look away in time to avoid the laser.

Aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft is a federal violation under Title 18, United States Code Section 39(a) which is outlined below:

§39A. Aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft

(a) Offense.-Whoever knowingly aims the beam of a laser pointer at an aircraft in the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States, or at the flight path of such an aircraft, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 5 years, or both.

The reports have been filed with the Highway Patrol and the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The use of lasers in this illegal manner is one example of the non-peaceful, unlawful actions toward law enforcement officers and workers. Law enforcement has witnessed hundreds of criminal acts including:

- Aggressive acts towards Law enforcement officers and contractors
- Protestors on horses charged at law enforcement forcing them to step back from property line they were protecting
- Numerous protestors trespassed on private property after several warnings
- Personal and state property has been vandalized
- Protestors blocked a state highway causing traffic congestion and unsafe conditions for the traveling public
- Continued blocking of access to private property, disrupting work on a lawful project that has met all federal and state requirements

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"We have also been made aware of comments being made against law enforcement on social media threatening our lives. We take these comments very seriously. For example, one post reads, *"we coming to kill. They better b ready to die Cuz we coming."* Other posts indicate the potential use of weapons. We have to take these comments very seriously to protect not only officer's safety but residents who live in the area along with those participating in protest activities. The threats are very concerning," said Kirchmeier.

Kirchmeier continued, "Citizens do have a right to protest and make their voices heard. However they do not have the right to disrupt traffic, close the road, trespass on private property, intimidate or assault law enforcement officers or disrupt other legal activities. We have the utmost safety in mind. If those involved in the protest truly mean this is a peaceful gathering they need to remove themselves from private property."

29 individuals have been arrested for unlawful activities involved in the protest.

A traffic control point on Hwy 1806 south of Mandan continues to be in place. Traffic going south is directed to take an alternative route via Hwy 6. The TCP has been put in place as a safety precaution for protestors, motorists and emergency service providers.

A timeline of events related to the protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline has also been attached.

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